

OBITUARIES

RICHARD STITES AND ROBERT V. DANIELS

In March of this year two members of the editorial board of this journal died: Richard Stites on March 7 and Robert V. Daniels on March 28. We are grateful for their numerous contributions to understanding of the NEP Era and for their support of this journal. We offer our tribute to them now.

Richard Stites, though trained by leading intellectual historians at Harvard, struck out on his own to pioneer the field of Russian social history, to explore making history from below rather than from above. In riveting prose, he crafted masterful history, weaving brilliant insights with what most historians ignored or overlooked to fill in so many of the “blank spots” in our understanding of Russian society. His *Revolutionary Dreams. Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*, which won the Vucinich Prize in 1989, utilized underground newspapers and gypsy music as sources.¹ He knew when the movies of Harold Lloyd appeared in Moscow. He captured the “currents . . . borne on the shoulders of large numbers of unidentified people-crowds, organizations, communities, groups of workers, creative artists. . . .”²

Stites wrote engaged history at its best. He resurrected the hidden and neglected for a reason. He admitted to producing with *Revolutionary Dreams* homage to what should matter most to civilization. He argued, “the ‘utopian propensity’ is the only mechanism through which mankind will-if it dares to – protect and preserve all of the realities it so cherishes including the most cherished of all: the holy and sacred life of mankind and the culture it has created down through the ages.”³ Culture itself, he insisted, could not endure without the “utopian propensity,” and culture constitutes a part of “all the realities” that we “cherish.”

Stites truly belonged to what he wrote. “It’s been a tough year,” he told *The New Yorker* in 1990.⁴ I researched my new book on Soviet popular culture. Three months in Moscow, three in Leningrad. Night after night, I

1. Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams. Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 250.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

4. “Triple A Double S,” [Nina Tumarkin], “The Talk of the Town,” *The New Yorker*, Nov. 19, 1990, p. 45.

went to the theatre, to cabarets, music bars, movies. It was really tough.” He circulated at the AAASS that year, sharing the latest *perestroika* anecdotes.

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Robert V. Daniels possessed the same moral impulse that engaged Richard Stites. He as much as proclaimed it with the title of his first major work: *The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia*.⁵ Though Lewis Siegelbaum has labeled the work’s “moralistic flavor,” “deterministic,” Daniels has left us a portrait that captures in equal measure the frustration, courage, ineptitude, and desperation of the Opposition.⁶

Its origin lay in his initial experience in the field. He assisted George Fischer in cataloging the Trotsky Archive, describing Trotsky’s papers as “crucially important for certain portions of the history the Opposition,” especially “for the 1926-1927 period.”⁷

The Trotsky Archive, along with the *stenograficheskie otchety* of the party congresses enabled him to chronicle Soviet political history in the 1920s. The same sources enabled Leonard Schapiro to produce his political histories: *The History of the CPSU* and *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy*. Historians follow their sources. The foundational works of Russian studies in the West, *ipso facto*, were works of political history.

In that sense Richard Stites and Robert Daniels stood at the generational crossroads of our field. By the time that Stites began his graduate work, the impulse and the opportunity existed for examining Soviet society. Western historians could engage that society to a degree unthinkable twenty years earlier when Daniels began his research.

While both historians moved beyond their initial monographs in women’s history and the opposition to Stalin, respectively, they remained wedded to their formative experiences in their approach to history. Lewis Siegelbaum, in writing of Daniels’s later work on the Soviet Union and its demise, laments that he “cannot find much social history in” such

5. Robert V. Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution. Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1960).

6. Lewis H. Siegelbaum, “Robert V. Daniels and the *Longue Duree* of Soviet History,” *The Russian Review*, vol. 54 (July 1995): 331.

7. George Fischer, *A Guide to the Trotsky Archive* [no publication data available], in *Conscience of the Revolution*, p. 440. He may also have been influenced by his mentor who had previously written on opposition to Stalin: George Fischer, *Soviet Opposition to Stalin. A Case Study in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1952).

work; Daniels “restricts his vision to the political elites. . . .”⁸ Unlike Moshe Lewin, according to Siegelbaum, Daniels fails to “insert the social ‘canvas’ in all of its historical complexity.”⁹ But Lewin had himself emerged from Soviet society. Speculation on Soviet society came naturally to him. Neither the absence of social history in Daniels’s writing nor the emphasis on political history should surprise us. The founding fathers of our field, whose formation lay in the West, like Robert Daniels and Leonard Schapiro, went in one direction. The next generation, represented by Richard Stites and those whom he inspired, could go in another. As we noted at the time we began this journal, we hope to bring both social and political history together in one venue to illuminate the NEP Era.

Our field, like Russia itself, has turned a corner, with the end of the first decade of the new century. Robert Daniels, Robert Tucker, Moshe Lewin, and Richard Stites joined Leopold Haimson, Adam Ulam, and Leonard Schapiro in laying the foundation stones of Russian studies in the second half of the twentieth century. The scholars of this century have a firm platform on which to build.

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8. Siegelbaum. “Robert V. Daniels and the *Longue Duree* of Soviet History,” pp. 334 and 338.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 338.